A person who has an expertise in a certain area, would often be viewed by others as a specialist or an authority in this field. Most would say that their expertise is something that they visibly excel at. Though this is true, looking back on my accomplishments this far in life, the ones that stick out are not any of the instances where I was the most outwardly successful. The times I feel that I exhibited my greatest attributes were when I pushed myself to work hard at something that did not come easily to me.

As a serial honor roll student and MVP for sports teams, when I entered high school I was accustomed to reaching every goal that I had ever set for myself. The new world that I was now walking into, however, had no real record of my past accomplishments and I now had a blank slate on which to carve my new achievements. I quickly realized that my A+ in eighth grade algebra meant absolutely nothing when it was up against the much more difficult, honors math classes that I was enrolled in. While realized that math was not my strongest subject, it was extremely difficult to deal with the fact that there was something that did not come easily to me. This was the first time in my life that I had to really try in school, I was not going to get a good grade, or even understand the material, without putting in real effort.

Out of this trial however, came what I would consider my personal expertise: determination to succeed, even through adversity. The best examples of my determination to succeed did occur in my math classes, or late at night studying stacks of notecards. While I saw many of my fellow classmates succumb to the new level of difficulty that Honors Geometry presented, for me, failure was not an option and mediocrity would not be tolerated. Even though this particular commitment came between some of my relationships, and made my extracurricular activities much more difficult to manage, I had accepted this challenge and was determined to see it through.

What sealed my drive for success was a simple phrase said to me by my freshman geometry teacher, she simply said, “It’s okay Alexa, some people just aren’t able to think mathematically,” Never in my life had I ever been so insulted, every teacher I had ever had adored me and knew that I was more than capable of any task that I received. From the moment I heard those words come out of her mouth, the only thing that I was sure about was that I was going to prove her wrong.

While I always maintained math grades that I was able to tolerate, they were never as high as my other grades, and never came nearly as easily as my English or History classes. Even though there were numerous times, sometimes in one night of homework, that I wanted to give up, I never did because I had no choice but to reach my goal, and for the first time, this was something that I wanted to accomplish for my own happiness.

Although many who examine my transcript would most likely see math as my biggest weakness, academically, I view these experiences as one of the main reasons that I am as driven to succeed. If I had never faced these obstacles I never would have recognized that I was capable of achieving. As a freshman that I just would not be able to understand math, and that it was beyond my grasp, and as a senior I was enrolled in the most difficult class that my High School had to offer, AP Calculus. I still do not claim to be a mathematician however, the biggest difference between the freshman girl who was awestruck that a subject did not come naturally, to a senior who knew that my nights would consist of Calculus homework and little else, was a teacher who pushed me and told me that I was able to succeed in math.

It would have been easy for me to drop into a lower math level, or just accept that I would only achieve mediocrity in math classes, I chose to push through instead. Some of this may have come from my pride or headstrong nature, but I think that the majority of it came from my determination to succeed at everything I try. For me, “success” became a relative term, especially in math. Although, I may have sacrificed a few A’s along the way, I proved to myself that it was possible multiple times throughout my math career. I made myself rise from a first semester grade of 79 in Pre-calculus to a second semester final average of 92, a feat I was not always sure that I would accomplish.

As my senior year approached I had the option of dropping into a standard level Calculus class when an honors option was not offered. I could have avoided all of that difficult work in my senior year, and even gone out on a secured high from Pre-calc. For whatever reason however, I decided to accept the challenge of AP Calculus, and one of the driving factors in that decision was my desire to challenge myself and push through a subject that I knew would be extremely difficult for me. Even though there were plenty of days when I would walk almost all the way to guidance to switch out of the class, I never walked all the way there, partly because I knew that I could not quit the challenge that I had set for myself. This turned out to be one of the most rewarding experiences of my academic career because I left my last math class, receiving the highest score awarded on the AP exam and now have the satisfaction of knowing that I pushed through to accomplish a goal that I was once told was unattainable.